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Soviet Missile May Be Peril to U.S. Weapons

The Kremlin has been shrill in its denunciation of President Reagan's dream of a sci-fi umbrella to ward off Soviet missiles. But the most frightening military intelligence report I've seen in years warns that the Soviets are beginning to produce a surface-to-air missile that might be able to shoot down some U.S. strategic missiles.

This could put the Soviets in violation of the 1972 U.S.-Soviet treaty that Moscow claims Reagan's futuristic weapon would transgress.

The Soviet super-weapon is the SA12. Tests monitored by the CIA showed that the SA12 successfully shot down Soviet missiles roughly equivalent to U.S. Pershing II missiles, which have an 1,800-kilometer range.

That means the Pershing IIs, whose planned deployment in western Europe has aroused such vociferous protest, may be obsolete before they're put in place.

This would be scary enough. But what is truly hair-raising about the SA12 is that it may be capable of knocking our Poseidon missiles out

of the sky. The Poseidons are the submarine-based long-range missiles, the supposedly invulnerable leg of our nuclear weapons triad.

Yet this is precisely what the CIA suggests in its "special weapons intelligence review," a just-completed report that is classified several levels above top secret. Though access to the report is restricted to a handful of high officials, details of its contents were given to my associate Dale Van Atta. He also saw a related State Department report on the subject so highly classified that even its code word is top secret.

The State Department experts suggest that the Soviets developed the SA12 as a weapon to use against tactical nuclear missiles, such as the Lance and the Pershing IA. And because "the distinction between strategic and tactical ABM systems is not well defined" in the 1972 treaty, the SA12's development wasn't necessarily a treaty violation.

But in addition to their obvious difference in range, tactical and strategic missiles differ in their speed. Generally speaking, the bigger the bang, the faster the flight.

Thus a Pershing IA travels its 1,800-kilometer range at 8,000 fps (feet per second). The Pershing II is faster. The Poseidons have a speed of 19,000 fps, while the Minuteman III, our best land-based missile, has a speed of 24,000 fps.

But it makes no difference to an anti-missile missile how far the incoming target has been traveling: all that matters is its speed. And the CIA report suggests that the SA12 is fast enough to intercept one of our 19,000-fps Poseidons.

This means that the SA12, designed originally to ward off U.S. short-range tactical missiles, might be capable of defending the Soviets' land-based ICBMs against our sub-based long-range missiles.

If the SA12 can in fact shoot down a Poseidon, or even if the Soviets only think it can, this would destroy the deterrent that many believe to be the only thing that keeps the Kremlin from nuclear aggression.

Bingo: The Justice Department's proposed legislation to ban bingo games on Indian reservations has drawn heavy fire from the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Bingo has become big business on some reservations, which are generally exempt from state laws.

The Justice Department proposes putting the bingo games under state control.

In a memo to the Interior Department's legislative counsel, BIA officials said they "strongly oppose" such a move. The BIA argues that bingo revenues help tribal governments to become self-sufficient, as President Reagan wants.